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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

January 25, 2002

On the Web at: WWW.USDOJ.GOV/USAO/TXW/INDEX.HTML

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**SAN ANTONIO WOMAN PLEADS GUILTY TO MAIL FRAUD
EXPLOITING THE WORLD TRADE CENTER ATTACK**

(SAN ANTONIO, TEXAS) A San Antonio woman faces up to five years in federal prison and a maximum \$250,000 fine for her role in a scheme which exploited the September 11, 2001, terrorism attack on the World Trade Center buildings in New York City.

Appearing before United States District Judge Fred Biery, 28-year-old **MONICA CERDA (a.k.a. MONICA LOPEZ)** pleaded guilty to one count of mail fraud. Cerda admitted to defrauding San Antonio citizens and businesses by collecting donations based on a fabricated story that Cerda's sister died from smoke inhalation as a result of the attack of World Trade Center buildings. One donation included a \$25 check made out to the Veronica Serda (sic) Memorial Fund that was mailed to a San Antonio bank. Cerda remains in federal custody pending sentencing. Judge Biery scheduled sentencing for 10:00am on March 29, 2002.

Cerda's co-defendant, 31-year-old **ROBERT LOPEZ** of San Antonio, remains in federal custody awaiting trial. On December 19, 2001, a federal grand jury indicted Lopez on two charges—one count of mail fraud and one count of making a false statement to the Federal Bureau of Investigation. If convicted on all counts, Lopez faces up to ten years in federal prison and a maximum \$500,000 fine. It is important to note that an indictment is merely a charge and should not be considered as evidence of guilt.

According to the indictment, a few hours after the terrorist attack on September 11, 2001, Lopez and Cerda opened a memorial fund account at a San Antonio bank to deposit charitable donations by falsely representing that a family member had died as a result of the attack on the World Trade Center Buildings. After opening the memorial fund account, Lopez called a San Antonio television station and informed them about the family member who had supposedly been killed in the terrorist bombings. Lopez supplied the television station with a picture, which Lopez falsely represented was a picture of the deceased family member and her son. The indictment alleges that the picture was an old photograph of Cerda, who in fact, was alive and in the state of Texas at the time of the attack on the World Trade Center buildings. The television station aired a story on its newscast that showed the picture, identified the memorial fund set up at a local bank, and invited the public to make donations. The bank has frozen the account and reimbursed donors.

This case was investigated by the Federal Bureau of Investigation. Assistant U.S. Attorney Tom Moore is prosecuting this case.

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